

SUBJECT to DEBATE



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FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION POLICY

The Urgent Need for Operational Partnerships Between Transportation and Public Safety Agencies

As transportation agencies strive to manage soaring levels of traffic congestion, public safety is at stake.

by Anne Canby

The level of traffic congestion in urban areas is soaring. Between 1990 and 1999, as vehicle travel rose 22 percent, the capacity of the U.S. highway system increased only 1 percent. The result was an average traffic delay of 36 hours per person per year, costing the nation \$78 billion, including 6.8 billion gallons of wasted fuel.

Traffic congestion is not only frustrating. It can be life-threatening. One of every three times an ambulance, fire truck, or police unit is dispatched on the freeways and principal arterials of the nation's major metropolitan areas, it runs into traffic congestion.

While public safety agencies must cope with the consequences of congestion, they also play a role in causing it. Incidents on highways cause 54 percent of rush hour congestion, according to a 2001 study of 68 major metropolitan areas by the Texas Transportation Institute. When a highway incident occurs, the fire and rescue, emer-

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Balancing Act: Security vs. Liberty

Editor's Note: This article continues the debate from the PERF Annual Meeting on local police-INS issues. We invite all subscribers to respond to this article with a Letter to the Editor (submissions should be sent to dedelson@policeforum.org.)

by Bernard Melekian

In the post-September 11 world, our greatest challenge is not dealing with terrorists. Rather it is finding the balance between enhancing security and maintaining liberty. The definition of that balance will not be found in our old ways of thinking.

The recent proposal to enlist state and local police to enforce federal immigration laws has generated a great deal of controversy. The arguments on both sides of this issue have merit and articulate real needs among the concerned stakeholders.

On one side, without additional resources, the federal government will never be able to effectively control our nation's borders. On the other side, local police have worked for a number of years to build relationships with immigrant communities. Enforcement of immigration laws could destroy that relationship and in so doing would jeopardize, not enhance, national security.

The problem with both arguments is that they are advanced under the umbrella of the status quo. What we need to do is completely revamp our immigration sys-

tem to reflect reality. Simply put, in order to strengthen the security of our borders, we need to open them.

Currently the vast majority of illegal immigration, particularly in California, is driven by economic necessity. People are not going to suffer on one side of an artificial line when they can provide for their families by crossing to the other side. Because border crossings are illegal, the "coyote" has developed as an integral part of the immigrant journey. This opens the entire border with Mexico as a potential point of crossing. Unless we are prepared to bear the expense of sealing the border and patrolling it, we will never be able to apply adequate resources to address the problem.

Terrorists who want to enter this country undetected benefit from this reality. First, the avenues available for crossing illegally into the United States are virtually unlimited. They simply join with throngs of other illegal immigrants and cross over.

Secondly, once here in this country, they can quickly lose themselves in the

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gency medical services (EMS), and law enforcement responders have differing missions at the site—including scene safety, care of the injured, and documentation of evidence. These missions may conflict with the transportation agency's focus on restoring traffic flow as soon as possible. For every minute a lane is closed, 4-5 minutes of traffic back-up result.

New operational partnerships between public safety and transportation agencies are urgently needed to improve the operational efficiency and effectiveness of both our transportation and public safety systems. By sharing technology, information, and incident management protocols, transportation and public safety agencies can improve emergency response and alleviate incident-related traffic congestion.

Yet progress to date has been uneven and is not moving at a rate that will enable the transportation and public safety systems to be managed optimally anytime soon. For example,

Speedy detection of incidents can save lives and reduce delays. Yet only 9 percent of urban freeway miles have incident detectors. Surveillance cameras are installed on only 13 percent of urban freeway miles and 1 percent of urban arterials.

Less than 5 percent of emergency vehicles are equipped with on-vehicle route guidance systems.

Only a handful of jurisdictions have cameras installed to enforce red-light laws, although red light running causes almost 100,000 accidents each year and 950 fatalities, and surveys show widespread consumer support for red light enforcement programs.

Technology investments are tools to reshape the approach to interagency operations. Aggressive, focused investment in core hardware and software is necessary to gather real-time data and to share it through integrated communications systems. Public safety and transportation agencies need to work together to

- collect comprehensive, real-time, accurate data and provide immediate incident detection. By deploying a network of detectors and surveillance equipment, agencies can monitor roadway and transit system operating status and detect incidents instantly;

- speed emergency dispatch, and improve fleet utilization;

- deploy automatic vehicle location technology in all transportation and public safety fleets. Implement computer-aided dispatch and in-vehicle route guidance capability;

- provide faster emergency response;

- upgrade traffic signal systems to allow immediate response to traffic flow conditions and provide green-light priority to emergency vehicles;

- enable data-sharing among managers and users;

- install voice and data communications capacity linking all transportation and public safety incident responders and system managers;

- provide multiple outlets to distribute incident-related travel information to the public to allow them to steer around the incident;

- provide current and predicted weather and road condition information; and

- use weather and road condition monitoring technology to improve deployment of personnel and equipment and to provide better road weather safety information to the public.

Simply investing in technology, however, won't improve the operation of the transportation and public safety systems. To fulfill the potential of the new technology, it will be necessary to create new institutional relationships; define shared management responsibility for traffic oper-

ations and incident management; and redesign incident management processes, procedures, and programs.

At the institutional level, strong leadership is necessary to make integration of transportation and public safety operations a priority. Agencies must work together to develop a common vision and agenda, based on mutual appreciation of the differing missions and cultures of the transportation, law enforcement, fire and rescue, and EMS communities. Upgrading skill; identifying new funding sources; employing more flexibility in using existing fund allocations; policy revisions; and management flexibility are required.

Strategies such as forming incident management teams and developing integrated interagency incident management protocols, together with forming collaborative management centers and developing real-time, mobile, interoperable voice and data communications systems can transform transportation and public safety operations.

Congestion is an issue that cannot be ignored. Fully integrating the management of the transportation and public safety systems is a challenge that will require a change in mindset. It is a challenge that must be met to serve the citizens who depend on efficient transportation and public safety service.

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Coming Next Issue: Problem Solving Quarterly

Problem Solving Quarterly is PERF's newsletter dedicated to highlighting innovative problem-oriented policing strategies that utilize the SARA Model to address crime and disorder.

For information on submitting a project for a future issue please contact David Edelson at dedelson@policeforum.org.